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Particular factors influence the learning of the disadvantaged child. Environmental conditions can increase the likelihood of learning cognitive strategies. Variations within the environment influence variations in cognitive development.

Parental influence may affect the learning ability of their children. Lower-class parents have seldom subjected their children to the pressures of a formal adult-child learning situation. The classroom should provide this situation.

Attitudes held by the teacher may affect pupil motivation. Teachers often lower their expectations for disadvantaged children and anticipate their failure. Under such conditions children often will not attempt to do their best.

Apathy toward education within the home and school environment influences the child negatively. Educators who feel that it is "not the school's fault" further alienate the child from the school; it is up to the school to develop a stimulating program for the child.

School experiences can reinforce good self-concepts or develop better ones.

The child often spends time unwisely in unproductive activities. New supplementary technologies are needed to increase the effective use of time.

Auto-instructional and programmed devices and methods might give the child a sense of greater mastery over the unfamiliar school environment.

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SOME PSYCHOSOCIAL ASPECTS OF LEARNING IN THE DISADVANTAGED

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SOME PSYCHOSOCIAL ASPECTS OF LEARNING IN THE DISADVANTAGED

It has long been known that some general relationship exists between the conditions of social, cultural, and economic deprivation and cognitive deficit. The environment having the highest rate of disease, crime, and social disorganization also has the highest rate of school retardation. Deficiencies in linguistic skills and reading are particularly striking. School dropout and failure, apart from what they represent in lost potential to the individual and his community, mean that, as adults, those who have failed or dropped out will be confined to the least skilled and least desirable jobs and will have almost no opportunity for upward social mobility.

A large body of empirical literature supports the assumption that certain environmental conditions may retard psychological processes, including intellectual development. This conclusion is borne out in both animals and human beings (e.g., Hebb, 1949; Hunt, 1961). One of the most comprehensive reviews of the effects of environmental impoverishment on intellectual development, by Clarke and Clarke (1959) presents data collected on adolescents and young adults who have experienced severe deprivation as a result of cruelty, neglect, or parental separation. Bruner (1960, pp. 203-204) writes that "...exposure to normally enriched environments makes the development of such (cognitive) strategies possible by providing intervening opportunities for trial and error....that there is impairment under a deprived regimen seems...to be fairly evident." Although he does not refer specifically to the environment of the lower-class child, Bruner's remarks seem especially relevant there.

The obvious implication is that disadvantaged children, who have a meager environmental basis for developing cognitive skills, are often unprepared to cope with the formal intellectual and learning demands of school.

Nevertheless, a fostering environment for such children can facilitate intellectual development. Bruner (1964), for example, suggests that certain environmental conditions increase the likelihood of learning cognitive strategies. And Clarke and Clarke (1959) report striking increases in IQ in a deprived group during a six-year program aimed at reversing deprivation effects. That improved environmental conditions may have a positive impact on the intellectual development of children is also supported by the studies of the Iowa group (e.g., Skeels, Updegraff, Wellman, & Williams, 1938; Wellman, 1940; and Skodak & Skeels, 1949). Informal observation shows that, even in the most economically depressed areas, where school retardation rates are highest, some children manifest considerable school success and academic proficiency. If we assume a causal relationship between environmental conditions and cognitive development, then variation in cognitive development could partially reflect variations within the environment. We can assume that no so-called underprivileged area is homogeneous: there are, indeed, considerable variations in the home environments of children from such areas - variations ranging from large fatherless families supported by public assistance to small intact families with inadequate but regular income.

Moreover, learning contexts are as heterogeneous as environmental backgrounds. Although the two contexts are not actually disparate, early socialization, mediated through home and neighborhood environments and mass media, requires responses different from those necessary for school learning and subject mastery. The formal learning processes carry well-defined criteria of failure and success not mediated through such behavioral indices as group leadership, influence, and the like, whereas the informal learning environment has no explicitly stated criteria or marking systems. In the latter, success may be more highly related to leadership, and failure to rejection or subordination by the group.

Even as his learning context changes when the child enters school, so does his psychological context for achievement. At this point the amount of continuity between the home environment and that of school can strongly influence the child's responses to the learning and achievement context of school. The discontinuity between the lower-class child's background and the school impairs his successful responses in the new situation.

The middle-class child is more likely to have been continuously prodded intellectually by his parents and rewarded for correct answers, whereas, in the main, the lower-class child's parents have seldom subjected him to the pressure of a formal adult-child learning situation. The middle-class child is likely to have experienced, in the behavior of adults in his environment, the essential ingredients implicit in the role of teacher. For the lower-class child, relating to the teacher and school officials

requires a new kind of behavior, for which he has not necessarily been prepared.

School curricula and learning techniques usually imply an assumption that the child has had prior experience in the complex learning area, where there are logical assumptions as to appropriate behavior and where success is rewarded and failure is disapproved. The teacher, trained in our not-so-modern teacher-education institutions, assumes - probably consciously as well as unconsciously that the school child is a quasi-passive recipient of knowledge, and that he clearly understands the teacher's educative and remedial functions. In this, the teacher is as likely to be confused about the child's expectations as the child is confused about the school's expectations.

Lacking sufficient sociological sophistication, school authorities understandably tend to expect from children a level of comprehension and motivation that can only be built through positive experiences in the learning situation. Children who are used to a great deal of motor activity and who have certain environmentally determined deficiencies in learning to learn, often respond with an inappropriate academic orientation. Teachers meet this situation in several ways, most of which cause serious problems for the socially marginal child. Some teachers establish low expectations, anticipate failure, and, true to the Mertonian self-fulfilling prophecy, find an increasing rate of failure.

Another reaction seems to be, "They can't learn; they don't

care; their parents are not concerned." This projective device serves to relieve the professional of responsibility, since it does contain a grain of truth: often older siblings and neighbors of the lower-class child have experienced so much failure and so much class and cultural arrogance as to generate a great apathy out of which none of them expects positive consequences from the school experience. This very apathy is sometimes reflected in the attitudes of the educational apparatus toward the lower-class community.

Still other teachers say, "It is all the environment - impoverishment, economic insecurity, segregation, second-class citizenship, historical chains. Of course, none of these things is the child's fault, but neither are they the school's fault." This approach has greater validity, invoking as it does social circumstances obviously crucial to the developing organism. Yet such a view often leads to negation not only of the essential responsibility of the school but also of the actual and potential strengths of the children. Most important, it induces an elaborate rationale for the further alienation of teachers from their primary function, teaching. The essential element, which is both professionally and psychologically threatening, is simply that, for the child inadequately equipped to handle what the school has to offer, it is up to the school to develop compensatory strategies through a program of stimulation appropriate to his capabilities. Essentially, the disadvantaged child is still further disadvantaged when the school, as the primary socializing and teaching agent, refuses to

accept its own failure whenever any such child fails . For the school to assume its full responsibility requires constant self-criticism and self-evaluation; these have not been characteristic of educational systems, despite noteworthy exceptions. To put it more bluntly, when teacher-training institutions and educational systems foster an atmosphere of critical evaluation of their procedures and establish high criteria for professional training and development, teachers will maintain a psychological connection with their children that today is often severed, especially when the teacher, with neither a theoretical nor a working model, must bridge social-class discontinuities. Were more of today's children succeeding in learning to read at grade level, we would be forced to reconstruct our theory considerably. They are not, and the total atmosphere in the majority of our urban schools having large groups of disadvantaged youngsters becomes less and less conducive not merely to the learning process but also to the positive child-teacher relationship that establishes motivation and gives rise to high standards of achievement.

Responsibility for this unfavorable learning situation is not the school's alone. It lies in a combination of social circumstances, historical apathy, economic exploitation, and a society that does not put its money where its explicit values are. Even so, the school most directly reflects society's failure: it is the one institution that has the opportunity to directly affect the situation.

In this total atmosphere, what are some of the additional

handicaps that the disadvantaged child brings into school? If we expect the school to organize so as to meet the child on his own developmental level, then we must know a good deal about the specific intellectual sequelae likely to be associated more with economic impoverishment than with affluence. Further, we need simple and adequate ways of measuring the actual development of each child's abilities, because they are the foundation for the skills the school is to teach him. Such specific information will enable the teacher to teach him more adequately and to present him with the most appropriate stimuli. Moreover, the child's probable success will increase when the material presented is truly consistent with his developmental level, since engendering a sense of competence, in White's (1959) terms, can sustain motivation, thereby facilitating learning.

The self-image is vital to learning. School experiences can either reinforce invidious self-concepts acquired from the environment, or help to develop - or even induce - a negative self-concept. Conversely, they can effect positive self-feelings by providing for concrete achievements and opportunities to function with competence, although initially these experiences must be in the most limited and restricted areas. The evidence leads us to the inescapable conclusion that, by the time they enter school, many disadvantaged children have developed negative self-images, which the school does little to mitigate.

Another significant element, usually ignored, probably helps shape the perception of himself that the child develops in school, namely, the use of time. Generally, time is inefficiently used,

there is minimal individualized attention, and the child often spends much time in unproductive rote activities, while the teacher focuses her attention on remedial subgroups or the omnipresent paper work. Given the high pupil-teacher ratio, the critical need is for autoinstructional devices or preprogramed curriculum elements to which the child can turn. This is part of a situation where responsibility cannot be placed on the teacher, and the frequent use of this down-trodden professional as a scapegoat reflects chiefly only her position as the psychologically operative instrument in the education of the child. In a sense, after passing through the whole of society's educational echelons, the buck stops with her (but not in her pocket). Nevertheless, this understanding does not improve the situation. Too often, the child is seriously understimulated, even with the best of teachers, and there is little over-all curriculum planning for the needs of disadvantaged children. Most important, society has furnished neither funds nor the educational leadership and training necessary for the new supplementary technologies that would enormously increase the effective use of time. These would, in turn, help the child develop a sense of purpose and belonging in the school context.

Autoinstructional and programed devices and methods might also give the child a sense of greater mastery over the unfamiliar school environment: they could reduce his passivity by giving him greater control over the timing of stimuli, thus minimizing cultural differences in time orientation. Further, in the self-corrective

feedback of programed materials, the teacher's role of giving reward and disapproval would be shared; for a child unaccustomed to these as means of motivation for intellectual performance, it might help decrease his alienation from the school. If these hypotheses are valid, then the new educational techniques could socially facilitate the learning process.

The extent of the disadvantaged child's alienation as a crucial factor in handicapping his school performance and achievement has been emphasized. Much of this is structural, and much of the psychosocial problem lies in the interaction between the child and the school. However, cognitive variables which have been socially influenced or determined also contribute to the whole process of increasing the mutual alienation of the school and the child. Among these one of the major difficulties is the often nonfunctional language system he brings to school. My colleagues and I have discussed this at length elsewhere (Deutsch, Maliver, Brown, & Cherry, 1964; Deutsch, 1964a; 1964b; 1965; John 1963).

I would like to point out here that social-class determination of linguistic styles and habits is an effective deterrent to communication and understanding between child and teacher. To illustrate, the child is unaccustomed to both attending to, and being the object of, what are for him long, orderly, focused verbal sequences. Yet this is the primary scholastic teaching and discipline method. Further, because the disadvantaged child is less familiar with the syntactical regularities and normative frequencies of the language, he has difficulty in ordering its sequences and in both deriving meaning from, and putting it into, context. This is all

the more disadvantageous for the lower-class child because he has a short attention span for the verbal material to which he is exposed in school. Consequently, he is likely to miss a great deal, even when he is trying to listen. For such a child it is extremely important to feel some mastery in handling at least receptive language. This is made more difficult by what Bernstein (1960; 1961; 1962a; 1962b), the English sociologist, has described as the different dialects spoken by lower- and middle-class people.

This discussion keeps returning to the need for helping the educator to develop a comprehensive consciousness of the psychological, as well as the learning, difficulties of the disadvantaged child; the real potential for change; the specifics involved in training children, for example, to ask questions, or to become aware of syntactical regularities, or to use autoinstructional materials; and the imperative need to maintain as high as possible the level of stimulation and relevancy in the classroom. Here the research and insights of the behavioral sciences should be able to contribute significantly, provided the educational albatross takes a few "risks" to accomodate social change.

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